As insane as this sounds, I've done the research. It's plausible. The idea isn't original; it was first proposed by Carlyle Thompson, a professor of African American and American literature at Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York. There's actually quite a bit of evidence to support it, just as there is to support the queer reading of Nick.

Gatsby is described by Nick, "his tanned skin" and "short hair look as though it were trimmed every day" (Fitzgerald 50). The short hair and the appearance of daily trimmings could definitely refer to the grooming habits of African American men.

Gatsby's West Egg mansion is on "more than 40 acres of lawn and garden" (Fitzgerald 5), which is specifically interesting, because freed slaves were to be given 40 acres and a mule by decree of Sherman's Special Field Orders, No. 15. "More than" is stated, but instead of giving us that exact number--it could be 41 acres or 400--but we're given 40. It should be noted that 40 acres and a mule was oft promised, but a promise not always kept and inconsistently applied (Oubre 79). There's an obvious metaphor for a man who feels deserving of something he doesn't get, i.e., Daisy.

Gatsby would be unlikely to achieve the level of success he did in the roaring 20s if he were black, and some of the upper-crust white folk would be likely to notice or take issue with his race, so it's only a plausible theory if he were able to pass himself off as white. There is evidence for this, too. For one, the manner in which he makes his fortune is bootlegging during prohibition, and bootlegging is a sort of counterfeit product. That could be a metaphor as Gatsby is a counterfeit person. He pretends to be someone he's not, he seeks an imagined perfection of a flawed woman, he lies about his past, he's secretive about what he does and his intentions, and being a man of color could be just one more lie he's living. He's even changed his name from Gatz to Gatsby, something more Nordic-sounding.

Gatsby is quite proud of his heroism in Montenegro. Of all the places he could have earned a medal, it's one where the word "negro" is right in the name--negro/black, mont/mountain--and it's mentioned by name seven times immediately like Fitzgerald wanted it to stand out. Also, his valor at Montenegro was immediately proved true by the medal Gatsby carried around. In other words, Gatsby lies, but the "negro" part is the truth.

How do we know he lies? He just told us on the previous page, "I am the son of some wealthy people in the Middle West--all dead now" (Fitzgerald 65). We know for a fact later on that his father remains alive and is far-from-wealthy. Was his family dead, or was he dead to his family on account of his color? "I was brought up in American but educated at Oxford, becaue all my ancestors have been educated there for many years. It's a family tradition" (Fitzgerald 65). He's awfully concerned with establishing a European heritage.

But here's the passage that really blew my mind with this reading:

...a limousine passed us, driven by a white chauffeur, in which sat three modish Negroes, two bucks and a girl. I laughed aloud as the yolks of their eyeballs rolled toward us in haughty rivalry. "Anything can happen now that we've slid over this bridge," I thought; "anything at all. . . ." Even Gatsby could happen, without any particular wonder. (Fitzgerald 69)

First, let's note that this happens as they are crossing Blackwell's island. Again, a geographical location is used that denotes "black."

According to Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, "Modish" means "Conforming to or following what is currently popular and fashionable." In other words, these are African American men who turned the social paradigm on its head and are being driven by a white chauffeur. In spite of a possible slave heritage, they are able to afford the luxuries of the time, looking at Gatsby, his ride, and his present company with a sense of rivalry. If these black men are able to realize the American dream, surely a man of African descent who can pass for white can achieve this success. Yes, anything is possible, even Gatsby. Even a black Gatsby.

There are smaller clues, too. After Myrtle is struck by a car, the incoherent speech of a man is "M-a-v-r-o----," which is interesting, because "mavro" is Greek for "black."

One the same page, a "pale well-dressed negro" described the car, Gatsby's car, as "big" and "yellow." Now back to the Montenegro thing, which literally means "black mountain," which may describe Gatsby, big and yellow may also describe him as "high yellow" was a term to describe light-skinned blacks, the product of mixed race backgrounds due to the golden skin tone (Dalzell, 2009). He may be a "black mountain" of a man, but he's also "high" like a mountain, but, although technically black, also "yellow."

Is this a meaningless distinction? No. It's not trivial at all. Tom Buchanan is an awful human being, and we're treated to Tom's racist rant:

Have you read 'The Rise of the Coloured Empires' by this man Goddard? . . . Well, it's a fine book, and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be--will be utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved. . . Well, these books are all scientific . . . This fellow has worked out the whole thing. It's up to us who are the dominant race to watch out or these other races will have control of things . . . This idea is that we're Nordics. I am, and you are and you are and . . . and we've produced all the things that go to make civilization--oh, science and art and all that. (Fitzgerald 12-13)

How are we supposed to feel about this? Well, Daisy openly mocks him and Nick says he's pathetic. Tom believes that the Nordics are the master race and that it's imperative for him and people like him to keep the colored folk down. Wouldn't there then be great irony on his wife's competing love with a non-Nordic person? A black Gatsby?

It's at least a suspicion on Tom's part when he puts the pieces together and outs his fears:

I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out. . . . Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white. (Fitzgerald 130) "We're all white here," murmured Jordan. (Fitzgerald 130)

Not only does Tom suggest that Gatsby is black, Jordan picks up on it and defends his whiteness! Why else would intermarriage between black and white even be brought up? He may have even suspected this for a long time before, pausing before he includes Daisy as a Nordic in the Goddard rant with a wink and a smile when he lays out the Goddard nonsense. Perhaps he sees her as sullied having had her history with Gatsby.

The trouble is, there's plenty of evidence to suggest that Fitzgerald was both a racist and antisemitic (Blogger.com 2010). That really changes the perspective. That underscores what Fitzgerald's true intentions were in the Goddard passage from the book, actually The Rising Tide of Color: Against White World-Supremacy, by eugenicist Lothrop Stoddard, published in 1920 (Turlish 1973). Fitzgerald was obviously familiar with it. It's even more interesting to note that both Fitzgerald and Stoddard had the same publisher, Scribner. As for the name change, Henry H. Goddard was a famous eugenicist (Thompson 2004). The plot thickens.

It forces one to consider that Gatsby is a cautionary figure, that negro men could be among us, passing themselves off as white, throwing lavish parties, living the lifestyle, wooing our women, acting as elaborate con artists, bootlegging, and involved in all manner of illicit affairs. Maybe that's the real reason he doesn't win in the end. Maybe that's why he's killed, as white men conspire against him. Maybe that's the real reason no one shows up to his funeral.